

The Violence Against Women Act of 2005

The bipartisan Violence Against Women Act of 2005 takes the groundbreaking Act of 1994 to the next level. It not only renews existing, fundamental programs, but also focuses on other crucial aspects of domestic violence and sexual assault, such as treating children impacted by the violence, enhancing health care for rape victims, holding repeat offenders and high tech stalkers accountable, easing housing problems for battered women, and helping domestic violence victims hold on to their jobs. The bill is a comprehensive measure that strikes the right balance between rejuvenating core programs, making targeted improvements, and responsibly expanding the Violence Against Women Act to reach the needs of America's families.

Major components of **Title I on the criminal justice system** include provisions to: (1) renew and increase funding to over \$400 million a year for existing fundamental grant programs for law enforcement, lawyers, judges and advocates; (2) stiffen existing criminal penalties for repeat federal domestic violence offenders; and (3) appropriately update the criminal law on stalking to incorporate new surveillance technology like Global Positioning Systems (GPS).

Title II on critical victim services will : (1) create a new, dedicated grant program for sexual assault victims that will strengthen the 1,300 rape crisis centers across the country; (2) reinvigorate programs to help older and disabled victims of domestic violence; (3) strengthen existing programs for rural victims and victims in underserved areas; and (4) increase funding to \$5 million a year for the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

Reports indicate that up to ten million children experience domestic violence in their homes each year. Treating children who witness domestic violence, dealing effectively with violent teenage relationships and teaching prevention strategies to children are keys to ending the cycle of violence. **Title III on youth and children** includes measures to: (1) promote collaboration between domestic violence experts and child welfare agencies; and (2) enhance to \$15 million a year grants to reduce violence against women on college campuses. **Title IV aimed at prevention strategies** includes programs supporting home visitations and specifically engaging men and boys in efforts to end domestic and sexual violence.

Doctors and nurses, like police officers on the beat, are often the first witnesses of the devastating aftermath of abuse. As first responders, they must be fully engaged in the effort to end the violence and possess the tools they need to faithfully screen, treat and study family violence. **Title V strengthens the health care system's response** to family violence with programs to train and educate health care professionals on domestic and sexual violence, foster family violence screening for patients, and more studies on the health ramifications of family violence.

In some instances, women face the untenable choice of returning to their abuser or becoming homeless. Indeed, 44% of the nation's mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness. **Efforts to ease the housing problems for battered women are contained in Title VI**, including (1) \$20 million grant programs to facilitate collaboration between domestic violence organizations and housing providers; (2) programs to combat family violence in public and assisted housing, including new requirements that domestic violence victims may not be evicted or cut off from voucher services because of the violence; and (3) enhancements to transitional housing resources.

Leaving a violent partner often requires battered women to achieve a level of economic security. **Title VII helps abused women maintain secure employment** by permitting battered women to take limited (up to 10 days) employment leave to address domestic violence, such as attend court proceedings, or move to a shelter. Because the type of leave needed can differ significantly from leave covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act -- and often will be non-medical -- these provisions do not amend the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in any way; however, the notice and certification requirements are very similar to those required under the FMLA.

Title VIII improves and expands the immigration protections for battered women. In addition, it would ensure that victims of trafficking are supported with measures such as permitting their families to join them in certain circumstances, expanding the duration of a T-visa, and providing resources to victims who assist in investigations or prosecutions of trafficking cases brought by state or federal authorities.

In an effort **to focus more closely on violence against Indian women**, **Title IX** creates a new tribal Deputy Director in the Office on Violence Against Women dedicated to coordinating Federal policy and tribal grants. In addition, Title IX authorizes tribal governments to access and upload domestic violence and protection order data on criminal databases, as well as create tribal sex offender registries, and strengthens available criminal penalties.